Star Myths of the World
and how to interpret them
Volume One

David Warner Mathisen
Star Myths of the World,
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Volume One
Australia, Africa, the Americas, the Pacific,
Ancient Egypt, Ancient Sumer & Babylon,
Ancient India, China, and Japan

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BEOWULF BOOKS
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INTRODUCTION

The world’s sacred traditions share a common system of celestial metaphor, with unmistakable patterns that can be traced across oceans and across centuries – even across millennia.

The outlines of this system have been tantalizingly described by Hertha von Dechend and Giorgio de Santillana in *Hamlet’s Mill*, published in 1969.

Details of it have been systematically analyzed most thoroughly perhaps by the Reverend Robert Taylor of England (1784 – 1844), working with the stories found in the scriptures we call the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

But although the insights of these and many others who have sought to clear away the “dust of centuries” (as de Santillana and von Dechend describe it) from this vast ancient edifice have been invaluable to my own work, it is also true that even after many readings of the writings of these authors, the comprehensive structure and underlying rules, as well as the deeper purpose of the great system remained elusively out of reach.¹

Over the course of much examination of the myths – and especially of the stars themselves – and through the process of analyzing them, publicly writing about them, and even dreaming about them for the past seven or so years, a clearer and clearer picture of the outline of a central pillar of this ancient system has presented itself to me, with different parts of it resolving into view at different times, often with the feeling that new images and connections came without any effort, the realizations being handed across, as it were, from the realm of the stars themselves.

Interested readers can trace the course of the development of my understanding of this system over the course of three books:

- my first effort, published in 2011, which began to connect celestial aspects of the myths from ancient Sumer, Babylon, and Egypt with some similarly celestial features found in the sacred traditions and rituals found in the Americas and elsewhere, but in which I was still taking the scriptures of the Old and New Testament in a literalistic manner;

- my next book, *The Undying Stars*, published in 2014, by which time I had accepted the fact that the system of celestial metaphor I had been exploring forms the foundation of virtually all of the world’s myths, sacred traditions, and ancient scriptures – including those in the Old
and New Testaments of the Bible, which I had spent a large part of my life taking literally – and in which I tried to explain the system in a more comprehensive manner, while also examining the possible implications of this evidence and presenting some possible explanations as to why the world’s ancient wisdom would use such a system of celestial metaphor, and what it intended to convey; and . . .

This present work, in which the details of the system have come into even clearer view, and in which I attempt to share with the reader the keys to interpreting nearly any celestial myth, along with additional thoughts on their meaning.

The method I have used here was inspired by a request from a reader who mentioned a wish that I would create some kind of a course or methodology for readers to begin to analyze and interpret and unlock the ancient myths for themselves, rather than simply reading my descriptions of the celestial metaphors at work in particular myths (such as those in my second book and in certain essays published to the web in the ongoing blog that I have maintained on a fairly regular basis since the month of the publication of my first book in 2011). “Teaching to fish instead of giving a fish.”

Thank you, Jody, for that inspired recommendation!

Therefore, in this present work, I have tried to come up with a method by which you (dear reader, fellow sojourner in this material-spiritual incarnate realm of earth and water, and fellow child of the stars) will be presented with the myths, as well as with some “hints” or points of possible significance to consider for yourself, and then you learn how to unlock their celestial metaphors yourself. Ultimately, it is hoped, you will grow more and more able to perceive and to receive – directly, from those ancient sources – the profound spiritual knowledge that these incredible metaphors were intended to convey to us.

Each myth will be described in the first part of the book, along with a series of questions intended to “point you in the right direction” towards possible celestial connections, and then there will be a page number listed at the end of the myth, corresponding to a page found in the second part of the book which contains an explanation of the myth based on my own interpretation of the ancient system.

Of course, it’s not an “answer key,” because my interpretation could be incorrect. I present my reasoning for the interpretation that is offered, but the simple fact is that the ancient myths and scriptures do not generally come with accompanying celestial diagrams -- although some of the ancient art,
including that of ancient Egypt, Sumer, and Babylon as well as some found in other parts of the world could be said to be performing that exact function, in addition to being incredible art from an aesthetic standpoint.

The ancient texts do contain clues and details which clearly seem intended to point us in the right direction – but sometimes there may be more than one possible explanation.

What does seem to be undeniable, however, is that this ancient system of celestial metaphor can be seen to be at work in virtually every set of sacred traditions, myths, and ancient scriptures of the human race.

The scope of this book is to demonstrate the system – not to analyze the entirety of any given myth-cycle or specific text from any given culture or part of the world. Therefore, only a few samples from a large number of different cultures were selected.

Necessarily, some myths which could have been used to demonstrate this system have been left out – in the future, it is very certain that entire books or even entire multi-volume studies could easily be devoted to the celestial aspects of any one of the many different myth-cycles and traditions which are touched upon in this volume.

Necessarily as well, some of the many incredibly varied cultures and myth-systems of humanity have not been included – but I hope that I have included enough to conclusively demonstrate that the system of Star Myths is virtually universal across every continent and across a wide sampling of different representative cultures of our human race. The goal is to prove that this celestial allegory is in fact universally present, and to teach you how to see it for yourself: not to cover every single possible example.

Descriptions of the myths, and discussions in their corresponding analysis sections, are deliberately kept shorter at first, in order to introduce the elements a few at a time, and become more elaborate as the “tour” proceeds.

The question of “What it all means” (or might mean – what it might have been intended to convey to us) has been touched upon here and there as we go through the different myths and their possible explanations. We will take it up again at the very end, by way of conclusion – but ultimately I believe that the myths themselves are the best teachers of what they are trying to convey.

I will give what I believe are some of the broad outlines of the system and the spiritual world and spiritual truths towards which I believe these celestial
metaphors were intended to lead us – but once the basic outlines are grasped, I believe that the depths to which we can dive within the incredible sacred stories of humanity are literally without end, and that they will continue to reward deeper and deeper exploration and consideration, without ever exhausting their riches, for an entire lifetime (perhaps for many, many lifetimes).

Thus, it may be best to simply sketch some of the spiritual connections which I believe are supported by the evidence, and which I believe to be operating across the different myths and traditions (for example, the assertion that the realm of the stars was used throughout the myths, in whatever culture or part of the world we examine, to represent the realm of spirit, the realm of the infinite), and then leave it to the reader to plumb the depths of the myths themselves for the insights and awakenings which await each of us therein.

The study of the celestial foundations of the world’s sacred myths is often called “astro-theology,” probably taking its name from the title of a book of the lectures of the aforementioned Robert Taylor of England, an ordained minister who appears to have wrestled with the texts of the Bible at the very points that create the most difficulty for a literalistic interpretation, until he realized that the stories – all of them – are actually celestial in nature, and that their intended interpretation could not have been as literal history.

In an attempt to explain this celestial interpretation, the Reverend Taylor regularly gave sermon-style lectures in which he eloquently, wittily, and at times condescendingly and with vicious sarcasm and ridicule expounded the evidence that the stories of the Bible, from the opening of the Old Testament to the closing of the New, are based upon the motions of the sun, moon and stars.

For his pains, he was kicked out of the Church of England, and locked up on different occasions, spending a total of three years behind bars. Two collections of his lectures were published in 1857, more than twelve years after his death: one was entitled The Devil’s Pulpit: or Astronomico-Theological Sermons by the Rev. Robert Taylor, B. A. and the other was called The Astronomico-Theological Lectures of the Rev. Robert Taylor, B. A.

Since then, the term astrotheology has become somewhat well known (the shorter version “astro-theology” being much more common today than “astronomico-theology”), and while it is useful, it does not transform easily into a handy label for the astronomical stories themselves (calling them “astrotheologisms” doesn’t really work). Astrotheology is a useful term, and one
which is becoming more widely understood and familiar as it gains greater usage through the efforts of those researchers who labor to demonstrate the celestial origins of the world’s myths. However, I would like to explain my preference for adding the term “Star Myths” as well. I believe that the term “Star Myths” has some advantages which recommend itself to us, and not least of these is the fact that the meaning of this phrase (“Star Myths”) is immediately apparent, unlike the meaning intended by “astrotheology” – a term which can actually be somewhat confusing.

This is especially true because the term “theology” really means the study of the aspects of God or the divine, and refers to an entire discipline with a huge corpus of literature, most of which corpus comes from a perspective of “literalism,” meaning from the perspective of taking scriptures as if they were intended to describe literal events rather than the allegorized motions of celestial actors such as the sun, moon, and stars. The term “Star Myths” avoids that problem altogether, because “myths” are generally understood to be allegorical and not literal right from the start, and the term itself conveys a very different set of thoughts and connotations than does the term “theology.”

The term “Star Myth” is also much more direct and less intimidating, which may not seem important but certainly must be counted as an advantage, if our aim is to spread knowledge and help others to understand, rather than to try to keep this incredibly beneficial knowledge to ourselves, as if we were its owners or its appointed guardians.

The term “Star Myth” is simply more approachable than “astrotheology,” largely for the simple reason that it is not a Latinate term. Its benefit on this score should not be overlooked. When someone hears the word “astrotheology” for the first time, he or she will probably ask “what’s that?” because it isn’t easily self-explanatory, whereas “Star Myths” is fairly self-explanatory.

Additionally, in recent years some researchers have begun using the term “astrotheology” to refer to the entire host of theological questions surrounding the possibility of the existence of advanced extraterrestrial lifeforms, which may be an interesting and important topic of exploration, but which is very different from the field of study originally intended by the term “astrotheology,” which primarily focused on the evidence that the world’s scriptures are based upon the stars and the heavenly cycles.

For all these reasons, I believe the phrase “Star Myths” is valuable, although I also believe that the word “astrotheology” has continuing value as a word used
to describe that field of study which looks at the Star Myths themselves and which explores the evidence for their allegorical connection to the motions of the heavenly players.

And so this present work was born – its intention being to examine the Star Myths of the world, in order to observe this ancient universal esoteric system in action.

Through the process of analyzing them for yourself, you will begin to match the celestial clues included in the stories with the distinctive features of the various constellations, as well as at times with the distinctive features of the various aspects of the celestial cycles (the relative motions of the earth, moon, sun, visible planets, and constellations).

The first volume of this study will begin in Australia, and then go on to examine myths from Africa, from the Americas, from the Pacific, and then from some of the most ancient texts known to be extant to this day – the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, and the cuneiform tablets of ancient Sumer and Babylon. Also examined in this volume will be the myths of the Sanskrit texts of ancient India, focusing in particular on some of the stories and characters found in the Mahabharata, which contains the Bhagavad Gita. We’ll conclude with an examination of some of the ancient texts and traditions of China and Japan.

It is my belief that these ancient myths are not just powerful literary works (although they are certainly powerful literary works, conveying a tremendous range and depth of exploration and depiction of the human condition), and they are not just ingenious metaphors (although on that level their mastery is absolutely superlative, and almost seems to indicate a superhuman origin of some sort), but that they are in fact sacred: that they treat subject matter that is “set apart” from the mundane and the material world – subject matter that has to do with the realm of the immortal, the infinite, and the divine.

The myths do not have to be literal or historical in order to be sacred. In fact, it is when they are seen to be metaphor or esoteric allegory that these ancient stories truly begin to convey their sacred truths to our understanding. They do not lose their sacred character when they are perceived for what they truly are: quite the contrary. It is through this understanding that they begin to command an even greater sense of reverence and awe than ever.
It is my sincere hope that you will be blessed by your interaction with and investigation of the ancient Star Myths that form a precious part of the combined inheritance of all humanity.
Constellation Guide

The constellations of the night sky can be an endless source of pleasure for those who have the opportunity to go out and see them in person.

The best way to get to know the stars is to devote a little time each night, observing how the actors on the great stage of the heavens change throughout the year due to the motion of the earth along its annual cycle around the sun.

It is also ideal if you can find a way to take a walk along a round-trip route that will enable you to have views of all the different parts of the sky, and all the different horizons in the four different directions of north, east, south and west, as you go along. If you can take that same round-trip walk each night (or early morning), at roughly the same time, for an entire year, you can gain a tremendous level of familiarity with the constellations of our night sky.

However, most of the constellations themselves do not simply “jump out” at the uninformed viewer – and without a guide to the constellations it will be next to impossible to “pick them out” just based on a vague awareness that you are supposed to be looking for a Lion or a Crab or a set of Twins somewhere.

Therefore, a good understanding of the shape and major characteristics of each constellation is an absolute must – and it is here that we run into some complications, because the methodologies for outlining the constellations which have been published in print form and even on the internet or in planetariums over the years (and indeed over the centuries) are often terribly lacking.
In fact, they are often so poor that it makes one wonder whether someone designed them to deliberately mask the important characteristics of the constellations, rather than to reveal those characteristics and to help people to see the constellations for themselves.

There is an exception to this lament about the published literature on constellation identification, however: the work of H. A. Rey (1898 - 1997), who is perhaps best known as the author and illustrator, along with his wife Margret Rey (1906 - 1996), of the Curious George series of storybooks.

H. A. Rey also lamented the systems used to depict the constellations, and in the place of the previous methodologies, he presented his own system -- one which would, in his words, “remedy the situation” by illustrating the constellations:

in a new, graphic way, as shapes which suggest what the names imply: it shows the group of stars known as the Great Bear, in the shape of a bear; the Whale in the shape of a whale; the Eagle as an eagle, and so on. These shapes are easy to remember, and once you remember them you can retrace them in the sky.²

For anyone who wishes to have the glories of our night sky and the celestial realm come to life, Rey’s book The Stars: A New Way to See Them is absolutely indispensable.

Not only does H. A. Rey’s system enable us to remember the shapes of the constellations and find those constellations in the heavens, but it also has another tremendous advantage, and one which to my knowledge neither Rey himself nor anyone else has ever attributed to it: his system of outlining the
constellations enables us to perceive the significant characteristics of each heavenly character, characteristics which appear to have been known to whoever imparted to the human race the collective treasure of ancient knowledge which we know of as the myths, scriptures, and sacred traditions whose origins are lost in the mists of earliest human history.

The characteristics which belong to each particular constellation will surface again and again in myths and sacred stories, whether those myths belong to cultures found in the islands of Japan or in the fjords and mountains and forests of Scandinavia, whether those myths were recorded on fired clay tablets from the culture of ancient Sumer or inscribed upon the walls of some of the earliest Egyptian pyramids, or whether they are still preserved and passed down in oral tradition among cultures who have retained their heritage right up to the present day or until recent decades or centuries, in the Pacific islands or among the Native American nations and tribes.

In other words, across the entire vast surface of our planet, and across all the millennia of known human history from the most ancient to the most recent, the myths contain references to these constellations, and they do so with specific references to details and characteristics intrinsic to those constellations – details and characteristics that are evident when using the outlining system as published by H. A. Rey.

If this assertion seems strange or unbelievable to you now, by the end of this book you will have seen (I hope) enough evidence to convince you many times over that this is the case.

Of course, such a discovery, if true, would seem to have tremendous ramifications for our understanding of the nature and purpose of these sacred myths of humanity – and indeed for our understanding of human history itself. We will briefly address some of those ramifications in a final concluding chapter at the end, as well as here and there throughout the analysis of the myths themselves as we go along.

But the main purpose of the book is to outline the ancient Star Myth system, and to explain and illustrate just how it works.

In order to do that, it is helpful to briefly present the main constellations which will figure in the Star Myths discussed in this volume. Each will be shown using an image from the open-source planetarium application called Stellarium (which is available online at stellarium.org). The image will show the outlines of the constellation in question (drawn in color), as well as outlining some of the important nearby constellations that can be helpful when it comes to actually locating it in the sky (and which will also often have accompanying roles in Star Myths which feature that particular celestial character).

In the description of each constellation, a few brief notes will identify the most distinctive features of that constellation (the features that will be important
when analyzing Star Myths that refer to that particular constellation), and
the easiest way to find it in the night sky (or at least, the markers that I
myself typically use in order to find the constellation in question as easily as
possible: there are of course countless other ways of arriving at any
particular constellation).

These notes and this entire section will be kept as brief as possible: the real
understanding of how that constellation figures in the Star Myths of the world
is best obtained through actual examination of the myths and sacred texts
themselves, and through gaining greater and greater familiarity with the actual
stories.

A few words of explanation about the diagrams in this book, and about the
analysis of Star Myths in general, might be in order before we begin.

*First and foremost*, it is important to state once again right at the outset that I
believe these myths and stories to be sacred: that they treat matters which are
“set apart” from that which is mundane, material, or related to the common
physical exigencies of existence. They treat matters related to spirit, to the
invisible realm, to all that lifts us beyond the merely material aspects of our
existence.

There are some who would seize upon the explanation of the allegorical and
celestial nature of these sacred texts and traditions in order to try to denigrate
their sacred nature – to exclaim, “See! Nothing more than nature-worship, or
encoded descriptions of the natural world and seasonal cycles! So there really
is nothing but the material universe after all! I knew it all along!”

Those who would seize upon the celestial nature of the sacred texts in order to
deny our essentially spiritual nature, and to deny the existence of a spiritual
realm which interpenetrates and permeates every single aspect of our
seemingly material universe, and which is in fact the source and origin for
everything we see that is finite and manifest in the material realm, have
completely missed the point of the Star Myths, and reached the completely
opposite conclusion from what they were actually intending to convey through
their system of celestial metaphor.

The Star Myths, as will be discussed briefly during some of the analyses
which follow, and again briefly in the Concluding Thoughts at the end,
were in fact using the celestial realm and the heavenly cycles as metaphors
to help explain and convey knowledge of the existence and importance of
the spiritual and invisible realm. We cannot see the invisible realm (using
our ordinary senses, at least), and so they used the most majestic possible
aspects of the material realm as their chosen visual aids to help convey to us
what it is all about. They selected the most awe-inspiring canvas available to
us in the physical universe in order to paint their stories which convey to
us the reality of the Infinite Realm – and of our inherent connection to it.
I believe that these Star Myths were exquisitely crafted to convey profound truths which are absolutely essential to human life and to the human experience. This is not to say that one cannot learn those truths if one does not learn them through the myths — there are many other disciplines and paths which have been given to humanity or discovered or developed through the millennia to put us in touch with the same vital knowledge — but I believe that these myths were in fact given in order to convey sacred and essential knowledge.

Thus I do not believe that perceiving their celestial and allegorical nature takes away from their sacred purpose: on the contrary, I believe that this perception of their celestial and allegorical nature can enable them to teach us what they were intended to teach us.

Conversely, failing to understand them as powerful metaphors or allegories which point towards spiritual matters can cause us to miss their true meaning. By this I mean failing to understand their metaphorical nature by reading them as describing literal-historical figures, and to beginning all interpretation from that understanding: this creates a tremendous obstacle to the seeker.

A helpful analogy (and one I often use in interviews and blog posts) would be the “teaching aids” that Mr. Miyagi employs in the famous original version of *Karate Kid* (1981) order to teach Daniel-san the “ungraspable” or “invisible” truths of his karate system: if we were to mistakenly conclude that Mr. Miyagi was actually teaching Daniel-san how to wax cars or paint fences, we would miss the point entirely, because those motions were about something else altogether.

In just the same way, these stories are not about literal or historical figures, and to focus on them as though they are is analogous to focusing on “wax the car” or “paint the fence” as if their purpose were to help us wax cars and paint fences.

Nor, however, are these stories really about the constellations and stars, the sun and moon and planets. Those too are actually metaphors for the real layer of meaning that lies behind even those glorious celestial bodies, and towards which the ancient myths and sacred stories are trying to point our understanding.

Second, I believe that whenever possible it is best to use the original texts or very direct, literal translations of the texts, if the myth being examined was committed to writing. Often, details and clues were deliberately included in the myths, but later translators have “paraphrased them away” because they did not know the celestial meaning of the textual detail that they decided to re-word in their translation.

Examples abound in the scriptures which found their way into the collections we call the Old and New Testaments of the Bible (examined in Volume Three). There are texts in which older translations (such as the
The Bandicoot Woman

In his collection of myths from around the world entitled *Myths of the Origin of Fire*, first published in 1930, James Frazer recounts the fire-myth of the Warramunga tribe of north-central Australia, now usually spelled Warramungu.

We learn that fire was first made by two “hawk ancestors” named Kirkalanji and Warra-pulla-pulla, who had fire-sticks which they carried about with them at all times. One day, however, “Kirkalanji lit a fire that was bigger than he intended to make,” and was himself caught in the conflagration, and was burnt up. Warra-pulla-pulla was so distraught at this terrible episode that he flew away in the direction of Queensland, never to return.

Onto this scene then came the moon, who in those ancient and far-off days walked upon the earth in the form of a man. We learn that:

He met a bandicoot woman near the spot where Kirkalanji had kindled the fire, and he strolled about with her. Then they sat on a bank with their backs to the fire and were so long talking to one another that they did not notice it till it was close upon them. The bandicoot woman was badly singed and swooned away or died outright; however, the moon man, being no ordinary mortal, brought her to life or to consciousness, and together they went up into the sky.

The celestial clues in this story are actually quite abundant. At the end of the account, of course, we are told quite plainly that the moon man and the bandicoot woman “went up into the sky,” and the implication is that we can still see them there to this day.

Can you guess the identity of the two hawk ancestors, one of whom was burnt to death in the blaze of the fire he had kindled? Can you find a place in the sky where there are the constellations of a man and a woman with their backs to this blaze, and can you see why they are described as sitting with their backs to the fire, and why the woman is described as either dying or
swooning away? Perhaps you can even venture to speculate as to why they are identified as a moon man and a bandicoot woman, based on their outlines!

Turn to page 244 for an interpretation of the celestial foundations of this fire-myth of the Warramungu!
pages 67 through 117 are not part of this preview.
waves crashed over, but Tuna was riding in the third and mightiest wave straight towards the hero with his jaws gaping to seize Maui and tear him to pieces.

Maui sent the slab riding towards the shore, and Tuna pursued it (perhaps Maui rode on the slab, like a surfboard). Reaching the shore, Tuna was stranded on the dry land, where Maui wasted no time in cutting the eel into pieces.

He gave the eel’s head to Hina to take home and plant in the ground, saying that it would produce great treasures for her. The buried head of Tuna, in almost all the versions of the story, took root and produced the first coconut tree.

This story has many celestial elements, many of which we have encountered already. Who, for example, is the most likely celestial character to play the role of the **virgin of high birth**, who takes a swim in a pool and is seduced by the eel? Is there another constellation near her which looks like it could play
pages 119 through 397 are not part of this preview.
the planetarium view on the following page, the handle of the dipper becomes the reins connecting the horses to Krishna the Charioteer (Boötes), and the cup represents the horses (which themselves could be arranged in two sets of pairs, one pair ahead of the other, just as the wheels of the cart are in the image above).

This image of the war-car of Arjuna and Krishna (as with nearly all the other war-cars depicted in Mahabharata art) shows the very pronounced “sedan” structure above the combatant in the car, consisting of a canopy or umbrella held up by four pillars. There is a constellation which almost certainly accounts for this feature, and it is located almost directly behind the figure of Boötes. This constellation is Ophiucus, the Serpent-Handler, whom we met in an earlier Mahabharata Star Myth in a role as

Ophiucus has a distinctly “boxy” shape, which in fact is like a tall rectangle or even an obelisk, surmounted at the top by a wide triangular “canopy” or “cornice.” Thus, he not only resembles a giant human figure, but he also resembles a tent or pavilion or – in this case – a sedan structure with a sort of “umbrella” or sun-shade at the top.

Directly above Ophiucus is the powerful figure of Hercules, holding his great mace or his club. We have seen that of this heroic constellation – but in the war-car of Arjuna the constellation Hercules (located right above the canopy) plays a different role. The banner atop the car of Arjuna displays the figure of the Monkey-King or ape-god, Hanuman. And Hanuman can be convincingly shown to be another manifestation of Hercules.
KNOW THE STARS  CHANGE THE WORLD

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE ANCIENT WORLD-WIDE SYSTEM OF CELESTIAL METAPHOR, SOMETIMES CALLED

ASTRO - THEOLOGY

WHICH FORMS THE FOUNDATION FOR VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE SACRED TEXTS, MYTHS & TRADITIONS OF HUMANITY:

SHOWING THAT THEY ARE ALL CLOSELY CONNECTED, DESIGNED TO CONVEY PROFOUND WISDOM FOR OUR LIVES.

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Heavens Above Her (star background): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heavens_Above_Her.jpg
Gilgamesh statue: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gilgamesh.jpg
Isis (from tomb of Seti I): https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Agyptischer_Maler_um_1560_v._Chr._001.jpg